

## **Section A-4**

### **Working with the Media**

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

## **Working with the Media**

Mission readiness and family readiness are complimentary concepts. Both rely on using information as a critical tool. Wide dissemination of information can materially facilitate recruiting, retention, and family readiness. At the same time, wide distribution of unfavorable information can damage the image of the Reserve components and your unit, and threaten the morale of your families. Inaccurate or incomplete information can mislead family members and cause them unnecessary concern during their most stressful time. The bottom line is this: messages you want send about family readiness can be aided by using the news media. You cannot dictate what the media says about you or necessarily attract their interest when you want it. There are times, however, when the media will be interested in your unit and its family members. If you are prepared, you can use the news media as a great tool to get your key messages out. Deployments and reunions are always newsworthy events that will attract press attention.

Take steps to ensure that the news media receive accurate, complete and timely information, whether from you or your family members. Keep your service members and their families informed about unit activities and family support services. Well-informed unit members and family members will be confident interview subjects and will be capable of providing the press the full story.

You can prepare family members by offering to help them learn to deal with the news media. Training in working with the media is vital for family members. Offer a class through your unit family readiness program. Invite the Public Affairs Officer to speak to your unit. Write articles about media coverage in the unit newsletters. Educate members and family members to understand their rights during any interactions with the media.

Obviously, the press will not limit their questions to family members. You can expect that they will also seek information from official sources. Your staff and unit members must understand how to deal with the media. Operational security must be maintained, but beyond that, you must ensure that you craft your messages to media while remembering the affect that your message will have on family members in the media audience.

Public relations and press liaison is a responsibility that must be clearly assigned to a member of your staff. Make sure that your representative has the information they need to accurately report on available family assistance programs as well as plans for key events such as reunion.

Game plan press relations before the media event arrives. You and your staff should prepare and routinely maintain a “3 X 3 Press Plan.” Using classic brainstorming sessions, identify the three most favorable and three most unfavorable questions you might receive from the press. Prepare answers to those questions and rehearse how you would handle follow-up questions. Keep your plan current and never forget— the press can serve as a highly effective conduit for information that family members need during periods of stress and separation.

The news media is an integral part of American society and should be cultivated on a continuing basis. Not only can you use them as a means of providing accurate information during periods of deployment, but you can also use them to enhance the public image of your unit and the Reserve components.

Grab the opportunity to shine. Appoint and train a Unit Public Affairs Representative. Elicit radio stations to advertise unit events that may be open to the public (i.e. Air Shows). Write unit news releases. Utilize the media to the benefit of your unit and your families. Show them best the Guard and Reserve components can offer, and how our families are an integral part of the Guard and Reserve story.